



Mercury

The Liquid Metal

Dear Parent:

We recently studied the element mercury. Mercury, also known as quicksilver, is a liquid metal that can be found in several products at home and school. We learned that mercury poses very little threat if properly contained in these products. However, if mercury breaks free from a product—accidentally or because of mischievous behavior—people can be exposed to mercury vapors. Breathing mercury vapors can be hazardous to your health.

Students are fascinated with mercury and its unique properties. As the only liquid metal at room temperature, mercury will separate into beads of various sizes and slide around on a solid surface. Unfortunately, this fascination has resulted in an increase in the number and severity of mercury spills in recent years, many of which have happened at schools. Not only is it expensive to clean up a mercury spill, these spills have also placed innocent students at risk of mercury poisoning. By increasing awareness of mercury's hazards, we can all do our part to keep our living spaces free of mercury contamination.

Our classroom discussions covered the following: 1) how to identify mercury and products containing mercury; 2) environmental and health hazards of mercury; 3) steps to follow if a mercury spill occurs; and 4) mercury-free products that can replace those containing mercury. Our classroom material included educational videos and student activities provided to us by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, some of which your child might have brought home to you. I encourage you, in turn, to review that material with your child to raise your own awareness of mercury.